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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001588

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY FRENCH RESPONSE TO AFGHANISTAN

REQUESTS: ADDITIONAL SUPPORT DOUBTFUL

REF: STATE 120807

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark A. Pekala for reasons 1.4(b)
) and (d).

¶1. (C) During November 25 meetings with Patrick Maisonnave, Strategic Affairs Director at the MFA, and Francois Richier, Strategic Affairs Advisor to President Sarkozy, the Political Minister-Counselor delivered reftel points while stressing the importance of strong Allied support for our strategy in Afghanistan after the expected Washington announcement and in the upcoming NATO ministerial and ISAF force generation meetings. Both adhered closely to the French strategy as outlined by President Sarkozy during his October 22 meeting with cabinet ministers. Specifically, they stated that France is concentrating its military and civilian efforts in Kapisa and Surobi provinces where the bulk of French forces are currently deployed. The goal is to be able to demonstrate concrete, measurable results within the next two years to better explain the reasons and objectives for engagement in Afghanistan to their general public and opposing politicians.

¶2. (C) When questioned specifically about military reinforcements, both acknowledged that France has the available capacity but stated that any change in the current French position against deploying additional troops would be a political decision that could only be made by President Sarkozy himself. Richier stated that the current domestic political context for deploying additional troops is difficult, with upcoming regional elections in March and some disunity among Sarkozy's UMP party members on this issue. He added that the "disastrous" Afghan presidential elections, followed by "a long period of deliberation" in Washington unfortunately resulted in additional loss of French public and political support that the GOF is now trying to restore. He noted that France doesn't want to "enter into a competition of numbers" with the U.S. and other allies, but would instead be most likely to base any change in force posture on being able to show demonstrable Afghan progress (perhaps through meeting benchmarks agreed at the January 28 London conference). Until then, France has done what it can to maximize and reinforce its combat presence in RC-East.

¶3. (C) On civilian assistance, Maisonnave said that France is already at the maximum it can do, given current fiscal realities. Further, he doubted that local Afghan institutions in Kapisa and Surobi had the capacity to absorb more assistance. Pol M/C pointed out that France could do more for Afghanistan nationally by contributing to ANA and LOTFA trust funds, thereby empowering Afghan security forces to take over responsibility from Allied troops. Richier acknowledged the truth of this position, but stated that France is facing a significant budgetary deficit and has on-going political commitments (such as the significant annual French contribution to the global AIDS fund) which

leaves them little flexibility to do more for Afghanistan. Neither of our interlocutors was able to respond when Pol M/C pointed out that other countries, such as the UK and Germany, face similar budgetary and domestic political difficulties but are still considering additional military or civilian contributions.

¶4. (C) Comment: Afghanistan remains a high foreign policy priority for the French government, but officials have limited their options to contribute more, both by President Sarkozy's public statements "not to deploy one additional soldier to Afghanistan" while also claiming that tight budget constraints effectively limit their ability to support civilian efforts. We stressed the unfortunate optics of France doing nothing more when it clearly has available military capacity and a secure domestic political situation (both of our interlocutors admitted that foreign policy questions are likely to play little role in the March 2010 regional elections). We believe our strategy to enlist greater French contributions will be advanced by Ambassadorial interventions (scheduled for later today and to be reported septel), the visit by CJCS Mullen on November 24 (also reported septel), calls from SecState and SecDef to their French counterparts, but most importantly by direct intervention by President Obama with President Sarkozy since Sarkozy has put so much of his personal imprimatur on the French strategy.

¶5. (C) Comment Continued: In the battle for public opinion, Maitonnave offered a positive signal, acknowledging that the debate about military and civilian contributions is somewhat "abstract" in France and will remain so until after

PARIS 00001588 002 OF 002

Washington announces what it plans to do. Moreover, we believe the GOF may feel increased pressure when other countries reveal increased commitments (and in fact, the French asked if we had input from our bilateral consultations with individual countries that we could share). Richier promised to "reflect" further on what France can do; focused high-level interventions will assist the French in their reflection. End Comment.
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